

FRENCH REVOLUTION AS A WORLD
FORCE 301

Weimar, replied to a request for his opinion in the historic words, " From to-day begins a new era, and you will be able to say that you were present at its birth." ' He was right* The titanic energy of a nation which since 1789 had devoted itself to the task of internal reform now turned to meet the foe. The second stage of the Revolution had begun, and nationalism blossomed forth in irresistible strength. The lawyers and publicists who had gathered at Versailles in 1789 had entertained no thought of aggression, and the Constitution of 1791 expressly declared that France would never fight for conquests. But when blood began to flow and the achievements of the Revolution were imperilled, the French people turned into a community of supermen whose volcanic energy scattered the hosts of-feudal Europe like chaff before the wind.

It was not to be expected that the victorious troops of the Republic would halt when the invader had been expelled. The inherited doctrine of *les frontiens natureHes*—the Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees—was proclaimed anew by Danton and echoed from a thousand throats. But the programme of the statesmen of the *ancien regime* was enriched by a new element of revolutionary idealism. The people which had won its liberties and defended them against foreign attack could now aid others to follow in its footsteps. On November 19, 1792, after Dumouriez' victory in Belgium, a decree was passed which reverberated through Europe. " The National Convention declares, in the name of the French nation, that it will accord fraternity and succour to all peoples who may desire to recover their liberty, and* charges the executive to order the generals to rescue the peoples and defend the citizens who have suffered or may be called upon to suffer for the cause of

liberty/' This celebrated decree carried a stage further the universalism which had marked the French Revolution from the outset. The Declaration of the Rights of Man substituted theory for custom and reason for tradition. The new evangelists proclaimed their gospel in French, but they believed that its music would sound as sweet in any other tongue. For the first two years they were content to allow it to make its way in the world by the intrinsic force of its appeal; but when the New France and the Old Europe were locked in deadly embrace, the military value of propaganda became apparent. "In the first moment of peril," writes Sorel, "it had been all patriotism, and in the first moments of deliverance all enthusiasm; and now the hour of pride arrived/* The Con-